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REPORT FROM

THE WOMEN'S ROUNDTABLES ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT

05 March 2001

Rural Development Office
Ministry of Agriculture, Food & Fisheries

WOMEN'S ROUNDTABLES ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Introduction

At the end of August, a group of women in Williams Lake approached their local MLA to express their concern that the rural/urban divide was growing and they felt disconnected from the decisions being made in Victoria that affected their quality of life. They believed women must have an opportunity to speak and be heard, and that the province had a responsibility to listen to their ideas on rural development in their community.

In the Cariboo-Chilcotin region, there have been numerous opportunities over the past 10 years for residents to discuss economic development from the land use planning process to the Premier's Economic Summit. The women of Williams Lake said that these formal consultations relied solely on selected participants who represented an organization or sector, and excluded the women who face the daily challenges of living in a rural community.

Their meeting resulted in a formal request from local MLA David Zirnhelt to Ed Conroy, Minister Responsible for Rural Development, to facilitate a roundtable discussion with women in Williams Lake on rural economic and social development. The participants were to be identified by local women and by public advertisements in the local newspapers.

The Rural Development Office was asked by the Minister to undertake this as a pilot project, and met several times with a small steering committee in Williams Lake to develop the format further. As news of the proposed roundtable spread, women in other communities came forward and requested a similar opportunity.

Four communities - Cumberland, Lake Cowichan, Williams Lake and Penticton - were selected for the initial roundtables in late January and February 2001. Once these initial reports from each of the roundtables has been reviewed to determine effectiveness and outcomes, additional roundtables may be scheduled.

This interim report outlines the issues and solutions identified by participants at each of the roundtables in Cumberland, Lake Cowichan, Williams Lake and Penticton. The bullets for each session are a summary of the points raised by participants during the roundtable, and are presented here as accurately as possible, based on note and flip-chart bullet points. Our objective was to hear from women, and capture their words in this report as accurately as possible.

The Rural Development Office has attempted to consolidate the themes and recommendations raised in all the roundtables in a summary of the key recommendations and a conclusion. The analysis presented in these final two sections is entirely ours, however we believe it captures accurately the discussion and solutions identified by the majority of participants.

Roundtable Reports

1. CUMBERLAND

The Cumberland women's roundtable on rural development was held on Monday, 29 January at the Cumberland Cultural Centre.

Michele Bagelman, Executive Director of the North Island Women's Resource Centre was the community chair for the day. Women's Equality Minister and Comox Valley MLA Evelyn Gillespie welcomed the 29 participants to this roundtable.

The following notes were developed from flip charts and notes taken during the discussions.

General discussion: What does rural mean?

- Some feel Comox and Courtenay not rural.
- Need to preserve rural character while creating opportunities to sustain the community. Avoid the rush to urbanization.
- Need to incorporate the reality of island living into government programs and policies, especially for the isolated smaller islands.
- Polarization of views within the community.
  - Lack of consensus for development - *e.g.* paving rural communities versus greening communities.
- Sustainability:
  - Economic, social, environmental, food, globalization
  - Community participation is essential.
    - An example of the community's loss of control of an opportunity for rural development is UBC's treatment of community and planning for Oyster River farm.
- Dollars need to come back into the community.
- Offloading of responsibility from federal/provincial government to small communities without any accompanying resources creates challenges for rural development. Local governments cannot be as effective due to budget restrictions and offloading.
- Similarly the offloading of responsibility for health to health councils occurs without sufficient resources.
- There is a need to understand what's happening in the Comox Valley. Examine the rate and development of the valley over the years to see the shift in economic opportunities.

- The "old boys network" in the community encourages barriers to rural development. Staff at the economic development office meet with incredible barriers. Men mainly run the Health Board.

- Lack of opportunity and access to jobs.

- Need for meaningful work for young people so that they will remain in the community.

- Economic diversification from the natural resource base to the retail sector:
  - Downsizing in the natural resource sector contributes to people aged 45 and up feeling disposable.
  - Service industry seems to be where most employment growth is, and this primarily involves women - not men.
  - Lack of opportunity for meaningful work for women.
  - Few on-the-job training opportunities.
  - Comox Valley has one of lowest wage rates in Canada.

- Need to support a social shift regarding the transition from resource based economy.

- Cost of doing business is high. Leasing rates as high as in Vancouver by OBC (don't use acronym).

- Aboriginal issues have an impact on job opportunities, transportation and discrimination. Unsettled land claims create economic uncertainty.

- Need for awareness of the marginalization of aboriginal women, women living with disabilities, all minority women, living in rural communities.

- Lack of resources: rural women and poverty.

- Need progressive solutions to rural poverty.

- Self-employment for women.
  - Need for supplements when on Income Assistance or while making the transition.
  - Need to balance the demands on time with those of family needs.

- Government should support working poor especially those on IA who want to move into self-employment.

- Realistic and reasonable government assistance & programming is needed.
  - Many barriers faced by more isolated areas & remote islands
    - Bring programs to where women live. For example, a bridging program should be available on Denman & Hornby islands.
  - Programs need realistic funding. It takes 3-5 years to see a difference, yet the funding is only for one year.
  - Same principle applies to self-employment programs.

- Wages for child care workers need to be increased.
- Women experiencing violence in rural communities face isolation issues.
- Higher costs of rural access to education.
- Transportation needed from Courtenay to Buckley Bay.
- Housing: safe, affordable and available.
- Alcohol and Drug misuse in rural communities.
  - Example: pot use and cultivation: perhaps economic benefit but creates social harm.
- Turf wars: fights between various organizations/agencies primarily attributed to a fight for funding.
- Local community working against globalization.
- Citizens Group Work

Issues raised and seen to fit into every category:

- Child care
- Realistic creation of programs and initiatives
- Discrimination

General issues raised:

- Notification of the event: people need to be invited earlier.
- Why women-only event? Need to work with both rural men & women.
- Scepticism about event. Where is this process going? Is it lip service?
- Need more communication about Rural Development Office. There should be more awareness of its existence.

Identification of issues & group discussions: What's working, what needs to happen and who needs to be involved?

1. Best practices: What works?

Union Bay Waste Management Project is a co-operative model of community involvement that includes grassroots community involvement.

Specific recommendations:

- Provincial and federal government should support.
- RDO to establish a group & fund it to support communications around the project.
- Different jurisdictions should work together as this project could have been streamlined if the different jurisdictions had worked together.

Community schools provide access to recreation, social development, capacity building, and are available to those living in poverty. They are an inter-ministerial initiative that works well. And is available 7 days a week to assist community with educational needs beyond what regular schools offer.

Specific recommendations:

- Government support (federal, provincial and local) required.

Rural Development Office is a good example of inter-ministry cooperation and a means of breaking down "stove piping" funding.

Specific recommendations:

- RDO job description to include facilitation of non-governmental solutions.
- Needs to be tasked & empowered to establish inter-ministerial committee made up of actual decision makers.
- Learn from the federal initiative - Rural Team BC.
- RDO should support local health boards to become empowered and funded to deal with unique local issues.
- Need to apply rural lens to impact of policies across government, e.g. Ministry of SDES should have direct contact in rural areas to understand the needs of each specific area and need policies that are flexible to address local need.
- Sponsor inter-ministerial conferences or forums with a theme of clarifying what rural development means.

Organization Serving Women & Children

Specific recommendations:

- Needs sustainable, long-term funding.
- Multiple ministry funding would be fine if coordinated and sustainable.

Connections Youth Resource Centre Project

- Local committee of local decision-makers, other agencies, federal and provincial reprepresentatives: removes bureaucratic clogs by having actual decision-makers at the table

2. What needs to happen?

1. Reduce the "facelessness" of bureaucracy and improve the exchange of information. Slow down the rate of staff transfers. Reduce levels of bureaucracy.

2. Provide better information to the public on existence and role of agencies working in community. *e.g.* the Rural Development Office.

3. Provide more control of local resources. The community can provide better management of local resources (*i.e.* Oyster River farm).
   - Allow more flexibility for local organisations to spend grants.
   - RDO should assist communities to strike the balance between flexibility and accountability.

4. Teach people how to understand what government does. Need to understand the process and the bigger context.

5. Access to capital would allow responsive, pro-active, entrepreneurial initiatives, which would generate revenues for local projects that result in economic and social development.

6. Rural development requires "champions" at both the local and government levels. Requires both internal and external advocates or champions.

7. Explore the option of local control to manage their own local stumpage fees or local gaming revenue to support locally driven economic or social development projects.

8. Government needs to take on the challenge of allocation of resources. *For example,* rather than giving the ICBC rebate to individuals, invest the money for the long-term sustainability of crown corporations.

9. Create sustainable jobs to do "social justice work".

10. **Agriculture** is one industry growing in Comox Valley. But we need:
    - A poultry processing facility on the island.
    - A test kitchen (community kitchen).
    - To explore agri-tourism
    - To connect children to agriculture in the classroom
    - changes to rules and regulations that govern waste water disposal if organic farming is to continue to grow as an industry.
    - Need research and development money to address:
      - Potential job development in running farms.
      - Potential spin-off in creating other "green" industries.
      - Oyster River farm & negotiations with other agencies.

11. Develop provincial strategy to declare Vancouver Island a genetically-modified or GMO-free zone.

12. **Transportation Issues:**
    - We need changes to transportation licensing to enable new industry to develop in this area.

13. **Apprenticeship programs:**
    - Re-instate apprenticeship programs.
    - Encourage greater co-operation between private industry and apprenticeship programs so that learning occurs closer to home. This will increase co-operative learning.

14. **Entrepreneurship:**
    - programs designed to support creation of new businesses require 3-5 years to reach stage of viability
    - Volunteer mentorship like apprenticeship program for new business developers
        - Utilize elders, colleges, women's business network, home-based business network, job shop, etc.
    - Create culture of "entrepreneurship" in Comox Valley.
    - Extend entrepreneurial training from colleges to other agencies *e.g.* Port Alberni Enterprise Centre.
    - Need group benefit plans for self-employed.
    - Work within the school system to facilitate creation of realistic expectations among young people around jobs and rates of pay;
    - Connecting small business and young entrepreneurs while in school.

15. **BC Benefits:**
    - Changes are required to truly facilitate transition into workforce.
    - Self-employment: requires benefits to continue beyond current one year in order to support new businesses.
    - Remove interference of FAW-trained judgement.
    - Guaranteed Annual Income should be provided.
    - Provide child care and transportation to those attending courses.

16. Rural development needs to focus on the creation of more value-added small manufacturing plants *e.g.* ostrich meat, shellfish.

17. Focus government support and attention on small businesses: 50-100 employees rather than on big industry.

18. Facilitate access to capital: put people together with expertise in parts of funding project, *i.e.* joint proposals.

19. Need a true exploration of how to address accessibility to economic and social development programs. Question is whether to locate project in the community itself or move people to the services?

20. Offer tax incentive to private industry to contribute to economic development
    - Hire someone and receive a tax credit that increases with each year of employment provided.

21. Creativity in problem solving around rural community needs.
    - We may need to find solutions ourselves.

22. **Access to information:**
    - Ensure rural communities receive up-to-date information e.g. Denman Island.
    - Better spreading of information regarding social and economic development programs could occur via the Social Planning Council.

23. Comox Valley has the resources to successfully network and communicate amongst itself, and is recommending that government provide a plan to bring it all together

24. Set up local women's community action discussions as follow up to this event
    - use local women to find the "non-involved" women to enrich the discussion
    - work with women's institutes, and other existing networks and organizations
    - hold a province-wide women's conference as focus for follow-up

25. Have a series of mini-summits and ensure is diverse participation: business community, aboriginal community, multi-cultural representation, youth, and elders.

3. Who Needs to be Involved?

- Requires federal-provincial communication and collaboration.
- Real decision makers need to be involved - not powerless representatives.
- Wider than just the stakeholders. Government needs to include people who care and who are affected in decision-making.
- Needs to be community-driven and not just political allies or obvious supporters.
- Include marginalized people in processes. A $25.00 honorarium is not enough.
- More grassroots, general public involvement is required - not experts and bureaucratic participation.
- Communities can communicate with other rural communities: work together, relay success stories *i.e.* marketing strategies.

2. Issues requiring more discussion.

- need youth voice in these discussions.
- employment can create a positive self-image.
- more forums with both genders, more diversity.
- mental health services.
- progressive solutions to rural poverty.
- home care support.
- Does sustainability = development and if so, do we want it?

2. *LAKE COWICHAN*

The Lake Cowichan women's roundtable on rural development was held on Thursday, 1 February at the Cowichan Lake Education Centre.

Pat Foster, Councillor of the Town of Lake Cowichan was the community chair for the day. Lake Cowichan MLA Jan Pullinger welcomed the 48 participants to this roundtable.

The following notes were developed from flip charts and notes taken during the discussions

General discussion: What does rural mean?

- Many felt definitions included in backgrounder were not true.
  - New definition somewhere in between the two.
  - Official Community Plan's (OCP) definition of rural: preserves values
  - Rural is a state of mind.
  - Each rural community is unique and less likely to have all services *e.g.* the arts.
  - Women with disabilities, isolated because services are not as available in rural areas
  - We want to remain in rural communities.

Issues Identification:

- Need more child care available: *e.g.* during women's participation in community kitchens or after school care.

- Family support.
  - Mothers who stay at home as well as mothers who work outside the home (and fathers too)
  - Elder care a growing responsibility.

- Safe transportation.

- Safety

- Education:
  - Quality
  - Facilities
  - Affordability

- Employment
  - Support for families when transition of economy results in job loss.
  - Education required to change attitudes of all regarding the changing nature of "work".
  - Mental health: spin off during times of economic crises and transitions
    - Need to attend to the fear of individuals about new economy and loss of jobs
  - Job flexibility
  - Entrepreneurship: support for home-based businesses.
  - Wage equity: child care workers' wages and access to benefits.
  - Agriculture

- Isolation & lack of communication
  - People working in separate areas
  - New community members have difficulty feeling accepted
  - Geographic connections: Youbou, Honeymoon Bay, Lake Cowichan, Caycuse, and Nitnat

- Cultural divides: three solitudes
  - Native, East Indian, and the rest
  - Need to bring everyone together

- Need economic justice
  - Poverty and the working poor

- Volunteerism: encouragement, recognition, incentive, credits, etc. needed.

- Programs to develop self-confidence for women.

- Training: skills assessments, employment development for those re-entering the workforce and for those experiencing job loss due to loss of industry.

- Land use: need to live in connection with the land.

- Addictions.

- Reasonable access to regional health care and for people living with disabilities as well.

- Decent, affordable housing.

- Need to be treated with dignity and respect by government offices and agencies: front-line staff need training in this regard.

Group discussions: What's working, what needs to happen and who needs to be involved?

1. Economic opportunities & development

Employment Situation and Economic Development

- Entrepreneur programs require support.
  - Economic Development satellite offices.
  - Creation of opportunities for women who stay at home.
  - Government agencies could link with other agencies to create a data-base of services.
  - Establish "E-Teams" for ALL citizens regardless of age; job-shadowing programs should not have restrictions.

- Accessible skills assessments: not limited to those on Income Assistance or Employment Insurance.
- Need supports so that people can access employment programs and training: child care and transportation subsidization.
- Need on-going support to make transition into new job market.

Economic Development

- Community Gardens
- Good garden co-op
- Municipalities should have more control over the dollars so that they can ensure that dollars stay in municipality
- Develop own strengths as a community; sell our beauty not destroy it
    - Tourism
    - Promote idea of shopping at home
    - Create bike trails with volunteer group
    - Part-time coordinator to work on economic development
- Meet with other communities throughout rural BC to see what working and not working for them
        - Share successes, get new ideas
- Create booklet to showcase the area's attributes

2. Family supports: health, education, social

Health

- Community Kitchens and meals on wheels offer healthy meals
- Wellness event planned for March 31st
- Community Gardens
- Addictions:
        - Gambling: balancing act between use for generating money and what happens to the person becomes addicted
    - Holistic picture needed
    - Breakdown isolation to address health issues (mental health connected to physical health)
- Community needs to work and play together

Education

- Educational model (e.g. Transtheoretical Model) which involves sharing of skills

Safety

- First Nations take over from the courts, incorporate family, elders, council

Child Care

- Government needs to recognize the need for on-going training for child care workers.
- Need for child care at work site.
- Need child care subsidies for mothers who work both inside and outside the home.

3. Connections and Networking:

- Network with elders: teach us how; write letters, visit, phone.
  - Establish a registry of elders who have time and energy and connect with those who need child care and relationship support.
  - Free calendar of events, "coffee news", internet and list serves.

- Malaspina University College: has some support systems in place.

- Apply pressure for true representation of rural life and women in the media.

- Utilizing more traditional activities as networking opportunities:
  - Focal Points: regular community events *e.g.* Farmers' Markets
    - "stitch n' bitch"
  - Identify champions for causes.
  - Network with like-minded people.
  - Creation of a Community Resource Centre which will be well connected to all resources in the community.

- Bridging cultural divides
  - Find out how to reach out to other cultures *e.g.* First Nations and take the initiative to ask how to be inclusive in such processes

4. Additional suggestions:

Public notification of today's event

- RDO should issue a media release
- Future ads should be more specific
- will encourage follow-up
- others have a right to know

Public meeting to recruit volunteers

- Wendy Klyne volunteered to organize
- Invite Chambers of Commerce, Resource Centre, Cowichan Tourism Association

Connect this meeting with those that occur in evenings and weekends.

- Meld the reports (Pat Foster volunteered to do this) .

Ensure ***child care*** is adequately provided for

- $25.00 honorarium does not cover safe, reliable child care
- on-site needs to be available

Ensure meetings are more ***inclusive*** of the diversity of the communities (*i.e.* multi-cultural)

Circulate report to local rural communities other than Lake Cowichan (Helga Lambrecht volunteered to distribute this to: Intercultural Association, Spirit of Women, CVRD, North Cowichan, and Duncan municipalities).

Explore idea of ***twinning*** with another rural community.

3. Who needs to be involved?

- "We have the resources and knowledge in this room"
- Need champions on the ground and in the government
- Everyone needs to be involved in reaching out to others to ensure inclusivity

4. Issues requiring more discussion

- Wood value-added
- Barter systems
- Transportation
- Subsidies in heating (Centra Gas Prices)
- Medical benefit payments and cost
    - Inequality between family/single on income assistance or employment insurance
- Internet communications
- Health
- Mental health-advocacy training

3. WILLIAMS LAKE

The Williams Lake women's roundtable on rural development was held on Thursday, 8 February at the St. Andrew's United Church.

Cathryn Wellner, local consultant and community organizer was the community chair for the day. Virginia Gilbert and Roberta Gilbert of the Sugar Cane First Nation welcomed the 37 participants to this roundtable. Evelyn Gillespie, Minister of Women's Equality, and local MLA David Zirnhelt, Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, joined the roundtable during the day.

The following notes were developed from flip charts and notes taken during the discussions

General discussion: What does rural mean?

- Williams Lake is rural to Victoria, but urban to Tatla Lake, Horsefly, Likely, etc.
  - Urban ideas of economic development & diversification are not applicable to rural and remote areas.
  - Problem with "one size fits all" attitude.
- "Focus group" discussion of 3 November 2000 stated the following:
  - Remote rural is different than rural centres.
  - Increased distance from services makes it difficult to access a number of things.
  - Williams Lake is often seen as the centre.
  - Maybe we should hold meetings in other centres as well *e.g.* 100 Mile House
  - How do we de-centralize services? Will that increase access?
  - People live in rural communities for a reason
  - Entire province needs people to remain in rural communities.

Issues Identification:

Social Development

- Alcohol and drug use

- Violence against women: Physical and mental abuse
  - Need programs for children who witness
  - Problem with abused mothers being removed from homes
  - Incidents of violence against women: need legislation which will require removal of offender rather than women and children (as per Section 28 of the legislation)

- Child poverty

- Services and programs for stay-at-home moms
  - Need support system for young moms (teens)

- Recreation programs for all ages

- Youth self-esteem:
  - Need support and care services for teens who have left school
  - Young girls experience negative images in media: stereotyping

- Care-giving roles (sandwich syndrome)explain

- Teen suicide and bullying:
  - Bullying is related to negative male culture/ socialization

- Family and Children Services:
  - Treatment needs to consider family as a whole.
  - Need long-term programs: after-care for families re-integrating after an apprehension.
  - Detrimental cutbacks to funding for foster parents
  - Need child care for teen mothers
  - Child development facility and programs not meeting the needs of parents
  - General support for 0-3 child care especially for single mothers

Access to Education

- Moving rural students to other school locations for grades 8, 9 & 10.
  - Post secondary education needs to be closer to the communities
  - Need more community colleges
  - Literacy
  - Need after school care and transportation to increase accessibility
  - Access for low income youth to access higher levels of education
    - Financial costs, student loans: students remain in debt for many years
    - Same situation for women who want to re-enter the workforce
- There have been cut-backs on the successful alternative school program

Employment

- Lack of employment opportunities in rural communities
- Pay inequities between rural and urban workers:
  - Lower pay for rural workers doing jobs with same skill requirements as urban workers
- Important to provide career incentives to keep youth in communities
- Need small business focus
    - Training and support to help diversify rural economies
    - Low-interest loans for small businesses
    - Need to include support for remote areas
- Need a Tourism Opportunity Strategy: pockets all over where women are making things happen, but need some co-ordination.
- Need value-added opportunities for local communities
- Need sustainable resource use

Intercultural Relationships

- Aboriginal and non-aboriginal communities
- Rural and urban communities

Justice

- Poverty: the working poor
- Lack of justice affects women and families
- Lack of understanding about equality: misconception about equity

Training

- For low-income families
- Need child-care provisions
- Need community colleges so do not have to travel throughout rural areas
- Need more opportunities for teachers and counsellors too explore options for up-grading their education

Infrastructure

- Using resources in the community reduces costs (*i.e.* utilities)
- Need ***community services***:
  - Accessing programs in big cities brings extra costs to individuals
  - Child care centres are needed on reserves and other communities
  - Geographic distance is not considered in program budgets
    - *e.g.* transportation and accommodation
    - Population *vs* geographic area leads to disparity of program delivery

Transportation

- Public transportation needs to be extended outside 100 Mile House
  - Having no transportation services leaves young girls vulnerable to accepting rides: leads to dangerous situation (community safety issue).
- People with special needs: no public transportation (bus or taxis) for people requiring wheelchair accessibility after 3:00 pm.
- Roads in disrepair.

Water Quality

- Need to ensure safety of water with testing.

Connectivity

- Many communities are without phones. This is an important issue for women's safety.

Tax Base

- Small communities' tax dollars are not accessed by small communities themselves. Victoria does not know needs of individual communities

Networking & communication

- Need mechanism for women to support each other in the community
- Need to be able to retain and relate the history of women in the community
- Need to know what's available from government: access to information and conferences
- Need communication between government and communities
- Need funding to support community networking: location, utilities, transportation, child care, break down isolation

Access to Health Services

- Wait lists for services, including mobile services
    - MRIs and CT Scans
- Access to services outside Williams Lake is a problem due to time and cost of travel
- Nurses education: why 5 years for qualifications?
    - Teach through public school
- Food security
- Health and homosexuality
- Mental Health: take "mental" out of mental health:
    - Need to counter the media's bias against women which creates desire for cosmetic surgery and other health problems
    - Need programs to validate women's self-worth
- Child poverty
- Drug detox and rehabilitation centres needed

Government

- Difficult communications with social workers in Ministry of Social Development & Economic Security.
- BC Benefits - access to entitlements is difficult.
- Need community driven solutions.
- Need to apply a "rural standard" over "urban standard":
    - Programs
    - Policy development
    - Funding criteria
- Need to acknowledge the cost differential for rural development *vs* urban development.
- Targeted funding: funding for communities needs to be based on community recommendations otherwise it is a misuse of funds.
    - *e.g.* Davis Inlet rehabilitation: providing that community with education on HIV/AIDS prevention when there are more immediate issues to be addressed first.
    - Federal and provincial jurisdictions present barriers to funding.

Environmental

- Need to monitor and protect air quality
- Need to expand the recycling system
- Need sustainable resource use

Women in leadership

- First Nations communities have many women leaders; however, no women on local government off reserve.

The Reality of Life on the Reserve

- No free housing
- Pay for health services
- Pay for water treatment

- Pay for education
- No free infrastructure
- What is not available for those living off reserve, is even less available on reserves.
- Required to pay for services but have no say in decision-making
- People do not understand life and quality of life on reserves: money alone does not make it better.

Group discussions: What's working, what needs to happen and who needs to be involved?

What's Working?

- Gateway Transition House
- Interior Women's Magazine
- Idea Fair (March 9th, 2001)

1. Intercultural understanding

Intercultural does not only refer to racial issues

- More discussion of definitions of rural, remote and urban:
  - *i.e.* Williams Lake is rural to Victoria, but urban to Tatla Lake, Horsefly, Likely etc.
  - Urban ideas of economic development & diversification is not applicable to rural/remote
    - Problem with the "one size fits all" attitude

More education on many levels on intercultural issues

- To address racial issues, education is needed which is not just in schools.
- Need to educate, promote and invite participation by using public service announcements.
- Need to adapt a process for both public events and everyday interactions:
  1. Define
  2. Explain
  3. Invite
- Providing the history of a place and its peoples promotes understanding and acceptance.
- First Nations have problems with drug and alcohol abuse but this is not just a native issue.
- *Williams Lake is in denial of its history and that needs to change.*
  - Education is important
- We need First Nations' representation on city council & Regional Districts.

Interior Women magazine is very important to building intercultural understanding.

- An exciting resource we can build on and with which to work

Community-based solutions vs. targeted funding

- Explore new ways of doing things if the old methods are not working or are stagnant.
- Look at the Cariboo Economic Action Forum (CEAF) model to offer forum for intercultural network.
- Women's weekend or fair with workshops, creativity, needs, issues & solutions
- Would like a 3-year commitment from government of $15,000 per year to organize annual women's conferences in the Cariboo.

2. Child, family issues and services

Marginalized youth

- Address lack of support and the need for care once they have left school.
- Community Youth Advisory Committee could present a study to the MCF regarding services for youth.

Violence

- More programs needed to address violence against women, for children who witness abuse, and for bullying.
- To explore ways to validate women's experience of violence and support women to get cooperation
- More support services for young girls
- Programs need to incorporate different treatments between young mothers and teen women who are not mothers
- Need ongoing support for women whose children have been apprehended or given into custody
- Prevention Programs need to value young people, involve them in program design and delivery, decision making etc.

New legislation regarding children who witness abuse

- *Family and Children Act, Section 28*, social workers have the power to remove the abuser.

More education and public awareness

- Family violence is not just a women's issue
- Collect information and stories about women's experience to increase public support on family violence issues
- Start anti-bullying and child development programs at a younger stage
- Involve all social, educational and economic institutions in campaigns to stop bullying behaviours
- Change the male-aggressive culture

Education system

- teachers need to be trained to be responsive to any violent situation at school.

Rural - urban understanding

- need to evaluate program budgets through a rural lens
- better understanding about the rural setting of the problems relating to services for young girls

Ban MTV

3. Health

Encourage more alternate health services

- Wellness Centres to encourage health care of and for the community
- Crisis line for support

Rural access to health services

- Mobile Health Services
- Create community transportation to larger facilities
- Larger areas (urban) need to be more flexible in scheduling appointments to adapt to rural realities
- Federal/provincial government financial assistance for travel to health services
- Handi-dart bus is only within city limits and ends by 3:30 (there are 520 wheel chair users)

Education

- Have courses in high school to draw interest in the health profession
- Make the care-giver course a 4-month course
- Scholarships or sponsorship to further education in nursing for those in financial need
- Local colleges

Home care

- have care homes within rural communities
    - have support services to enable people to remain in homes longer
- increase hours of home support services
- have home support workers in rural communities: use practical nurses
- first nurse on call system (practitioner nurses) when doctors not available
- Doctors and nurses do home visits
- Pathfinders helps people prepare for the next stage

Establish health network so that everyone can keep in touch

- health groups go seek information in rural areas

Ensure rural representation in meetings & on boards

Access to good food

- Develop better knowledge and education about food

Issues requiring more discussion:

- Funding sources promoting partners who may not be applicable to projects resulting or creating problems.

4. PENTICTON

The Penticton women's roundtable on rural development was held on Tuesday, 22 February at the Penticton Lakeside Resort.

Wendy Rogers, coordinator of the Penticton & Area Women's Centre was the community chair for the day. Ed Conroy, Minister of Agriculture, Food & Fisheries, and Minister responsible for Rural Development welcomed the 61 participants to this roundtable, and Evelyn Gillespie, Minister of Women's Equality provided closing remarks.

The following notes were developed from flip charts and notes taken during the discussions.

General discussion: What does rural mean?

- Anything beyond Hope.
- Majority of decisions made by Victoria or Vancouver.
- Rural MLAs sometimes feel like within BC what BC feels like in relation to Ottawa, *i.e.* alienation.
- Need another term: semi-rural for places like Penticton and Kelowna.
    - Need a definition that is in the middle of urban and rural: it is a relative term.
    - Compared to Toronto, Penticton is rural.
    - Penticton is more urban than outlying areas, but rural as to service availability.
        - Penticton's population fluctuates greatly between summer and winter & this complicates sustainability.
- If Penticton is rural, why have an "urban planner"?
- Rural is Clawston, Oliver, etc.
- Rural refers to places where calls that come into the RCMP after 4:00 pm are sent to Kelowna.
- Lack of technological resources makes Penticton more rural than Prince George.
- Isolation defines rural.
- Youth will describe Penticton as rural because they are "bored".

Issues Identification:

Isolation results from lack of resources

- People face difficulties in accessing:
    - Social assistance
    - Transportation
    - Health
    - Police
    - Food
    - Education resources
    - Communications, for example, postal delivery takes 1½ weeks to deliver mail between Penticton and Kermeos.
- Provincial boards need to have more rural representation.

Social Services

- single parent resources
- daycare
- employment, education, student parents
- need more social and community involvement
- income assistance is not responsive to rural communities; more flexibility is needed.
- lack of foster parents in rural areas
- need study on disability issues for the area

Rural Child Care

- People face difficulties with the following:
  - Access to childcare
  - Arranging subsidies (slow responses)
  - Transportation
  - Subsidy rate - is currently inadequate
- Government is unresponsive to rural needs
  - Lack of child care & the need licensed subsidies

Public Transportation

- Need more public transit from rural areas into Penticton to Kelowna etc. (to the main centres)
- People often have no option but to hitch hike. This poses safety problem.

Health Services

- Experiencing diminished health services
  - Obstetric care
  - Extended care
  - Need a detox centre
- Keep rural hospitals as hospitals and not geriatric units
- Clinics should be open at night
- Need more opportunities for nursing education
- Need public education about fetal alcohol syndrome
- Water quality

Mental Health:

- Lack of resources for women and no support for people released from hospitals.
  - Need women's transition house for those with mental health issues.

Housing:

- Need low-income housing for seniors and those with mental health issues.

Education & youth:

- Especially needed for post secondary.
- Support for young women and education for the future.

Access to jobs:

- Employment office needed in the community.
  - Need the summer farm labour office back.
- Urban people apply for rural jobs and because of better educational opportunities, they get the jobs.
  - Urban people want to move to rural communities and end up taking jobs because rural people cannot compete.
- Lack of opportunities for full-time work.

Self-Employment:

- Need access to internet (which includes information on free site locations)
- Need transportation services and subsidies to access programs and maintain employment
- Eliminate age restrictions on program eligibility
- Small business advice, mentorships, etc. require more resources in this area.
- Accessing programs difficult due to income-based eligibility (that is, income of I.A or E.I)
- Need access to transitioning programs: *e.g.* medical, dental, training, and tax benefits
- Need to enhance training benefits

Agriculture

- Problems with the current employment standards.
- Marginalization experienced by most workers (often visible minority members)
- Need a variety of agricultural options for women
- Farm safety is a concern.
  - Impact of pesticides and sprays especially on pregnant women
  - Research the link between sprays and learning disabilities.

Lack of resources & multi-culturalism:

- Need resources, need opportunities that would result in self-sufficiency.
- Lack of legal services for women
- Need a place to network and do advocacy for rural women
- Need community development for multi-culturalism
- Lack of immigration and citizenship assistance services for seniors, employment, health, education, legal services, and agriculture
- Lack of provincial government consultation with rural communities

General:

- Notification should have been sooner and the advertising should have included more detail about the discussion.

Group discussions: What's working, what needs to happen and who needs to be involved?

What's Working?

1. Transportation

- transit from Princeton to Penticton
- handi-dart
- bus needed for evenings and weekends in Naramata
- Night bus transportation to and from rural areas
- Highways and roads need better maintenance

Recommendation:

- Expand on all of the above

Who needs to be involved:

- *Public Participation*
  - Identify groups within each community to lobby for what is needed
    - Form committee *e.g.* transportation committees and follow-up on these suggested solutions
    - Hold a march on "Ironman Day"
- Call for a better schedule to the airport to attract businesses and tourists
- Appeal when denied BC Benefits travel funds
- Connect with Social Planning Committees of local government

2. Education

- Value work done at home
  - Educate young boys about family responsibility
  - Educational programs need to be structured for women and available to all women
    - Working women
    - Women in poverty
- 4H clubs provide leadership skills
- Use more volunteers - Women's Institutes work well
- Student loans: youth need to be taught how to best use the student loan system
- Review Home Economics and Life Skills programs
- Create more adult education and literacy programs so that they exist in all rural communities
  - Incorporate child care and transportation into financial support
- Small communities need more access to transportation and child care to access to education
- Need more networking between seniors, teens, and those in their middle age to "share the wealth".
- Provide career options
- Long-term funding options needed
- Education to remove the stigma of working in trades and technology sectors
- Employers need to provide more on-site child care
- Free tuition

3. Employment

There are three basic issues:

A. Communication
B. Government perpetuation of barriers and poverty
C. Financial security for women

A. Communication

- Need better communication between government levels and within government
    - Provincial-federal and within provincial and federal departments
    - Existing services need to be communicated more broadly
- Centralize intra-government services and resources
    - Federal-provincial-local all in same place
    - Federal and provincial governments need to work together
- *Educate the Educators*
    - Government staff needs to know what others are doing and share the information with others
- Educate employers on needs of employees to ensure sustainability of employment.
- Educate employers on employment issues specific to women.

B. Government perpetuation of barriers and poverty

- Remove income-based eligibility for accessing government services
    - Level the playing field
    - Make programs and resources available to all regardless of income source
- Make information available to all.
- Transportation benefits
    - Need to be accessible to women regardless of income
- Provide information to youth about the real world
- More universality of programs
- Make drug and alcohol services available to women regardless of income source

C. Financial Security

- Establish more programs and resources:
    - Co-ops, mentorships, small business loans
    - Offer more tax breaks
- Family maintenance programs
    - Need to be more accessible to women who are not on I.A.

Recommendation:

- Expand on all of the above
- Hold a provincial women's conference on rural development with decision-makers in attendance.

Who needs to be involved:

- Everyone

4. Housing and social issues

- Some services are available for advocacy and networking, but there are systemic problems that need to be addressed at policy and program levels in government.
- The solution needed must be more than urban-dictated solutions. Local community and advocates need to have their voice be heard.

Recommendations:

- An Advocacy Centre to provide one-stop for all social issues & access to programs.
- Provide workers with on-going training in advocacy, but also share the opportunity for training with those interested.
- Use existing services or models as spring board for expanding services.
  - Connect Women's Centres to, and in, every community.
  - Multi-cultural centre an excellent model
- Establish a full-continuum of services especially regarding housing:
  - emergency housing
  - low-income housing & affordable housing for seniors
- Fully support child care.
  - provide transportation support.
  - provide transitional support after age 19.

Who needs to be involved

- Politicians, grassroots, policy makers, people in communities, local resources
  - Everyone in between, and in every community
- Women need to be involved in ALL levels of politics

Issues requiring further discussion:

- Health
  - Detox and recovery
- Discrimination
  - Pay equity
- Housing
- Children/Youth
- Small business support
- How to access provincial and federal representatives
- Seniors
  - how to live an active, social, affordable life:
    Growing **OL**d **D**isgracefully
- Working poor
- Legal services & need for more community law offices with expanded mandates.
- *Safety in the workplace*
  - WCB involvement
  - Sexual harassment

Who will do what:

- Jeanette will connect with the Social Development Committee of the local council and the Regional District.
- Hilma will connect with the youth asset building.

SUMMARY OF KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Give communities more control:**
   - Rural people want to have a voice in how resources are allocated within their communities.
     - Federal and provincial government must support local communities when they have identified the solutions to their challenges.
     - Devolve more control of local resources to the community to manage. Examples included:
       - Oyster River farm
       - Community forests
       - Local organizations to deliver government programs

   - One size does not fit all.
     - Allocate funding for economic and social development on the needs identified by the community rather than funding programs into which communities must try to fit.
     - Access to BC Benefits and services from the Ministry of Social Development & Economic Security were identified as difficult, and need to be examined through a rural lens.

2. **Provide more opportunities for communication:**
   - Provide support and opportunities for rural communities to communicate with each other and with the other levels of government about their experiences of rural life. This will help reduce the feeling of isolation and alienation.
     - Support and fund a rural women's conference in a rural community in the autumn of this year.

   - Share information about services amongst all levels of government, and be informed about all levels of government services offered in rural communities.

   - Community and individual participation was identified as key to the long-term sustainability of rural life:
     - Support the demand for more opportunities to engage in discussions with governments.
     - Include more people in the discussions by supporting links between groups *i.e.* seniors and single or stay-at-home moms.

3. **Support agriculture - a growing industry in rural BC:**
   - To take advantage of the opportunity agriculture offers, rural communities need government support for:
     - Research and development
       - Agri-tourism opportunities
       - Organic farming
       - Women's jobs in farming
     - Community kitchens
     - Education - connects kids to agriculture in the classroom

4. **Encourage small business and entrepreneurship:**
   - Government should support the culture of "entrepreneurship" by:
     - Supporting mentorship programs
     - Expanding entrepreneurial training from colleges to more community based agencies - *i.e.* the Port Alberni Entrepreneur Centre
     - Facilitating rural access to capital
     - Creating a data-base of all government services offered
     - Providing child care support
   - Support co-ops and provide small business loans to women

5. **Fund the rural transportation infrastructure:**
   - Support and fund the rural public transportation infrastructure.
     - Infrequent, or no transportation services creates dangerous situations particularly for young women.
     - People with disabilities (wheelchairs) have limited access to public transport. Handi-dart buses for example are only available within city limits and service ends at 3:30 p.m.

6. **Ensure rural access to government programs:**

   A. Child care:
   - Rural communities need greater access to child care in order to take advantage of employment, education and training opportunities when they arise.

   B. Health care:
   - Rural access to health care is perceived to be diminishing. Government needs to address the following:
     - Growing wait lists for MRIs and CT Scans
     - Travel requirements to obtain hospital and acute care
     - Lack of detox and rehabilitation centres in rural communities
     - Need for extended and long-term care facilities
     - More opportunities for nursing education
   - Support wellness centres to encourage better health care.
   - Government should encourage food security and assist communities who wish to be gmo-free. Government should also educate people about food and what is in it within the context that good food will improve people's long-term health.
   - Mental health services in rural communities needs more support, particularly for women. Request for a women's transition house for those with mental health issues was made by Penticton for example.

   C. Social support:
   - Government needs to be more responsive to rural needs by increasing the flexibility within programs for:
     - Income assistance
     - Housing
     - Foster parents
     - Disability

- Seniors
- Making the transition to employment
- Training benefits

D. Education and training

- Support more adult education and literacy programs in all rural communities.

- Assist rural women to access education by:
    - providing support for child care and transportation.
    - enhancing access through more community colleges or by using community-based organizations or agencies to deliver education and training services in rural communities.

E. Develop a rural lens:

- Implement a rural lens for all government programs, policies, structures and service delivery.
- Talk with people living in rural communities and include them in designing the rural lens.

CONCLUSION

At all four roundtables, women participated fully despite their initial feelings of cynicism with government consultations.

Similar issues of concern about rural development were raised at each roundtable, and the participants identified the need for everyone to be involved in finding local solutions to the challenges facing their rural communities.

From the perspective of those who attended, the rural/urban divide seems to be widening in British Columbia. Comments were made at each roundtable on how the federal and provincial government undertook economic or social initiatives that either adversely impacted rural lives or provided no benefit whatsoever because program requirements and design were developed without a rural perspective.

The strong recommendation made for the development of a rural lens across provincial programs to reflect the rural lens adopted by the federal government grew out of this frustration.

This initial round of *Women's Roundtables on Rural Development* was seen as a positive step towards increasing communication between people living in rural communities and government staff in Victoria or Ottawa. Both the federal Canadian Rural Partnership Program and the provincial Rural Development Office were welcomed as initial steps towards greater inter-government and inter-ministry communication.

However, there was also a recommendation that there is room for more inter-ministry and inter-government collaboration in policies and programs that involve rural development. Government program delivery needs to be responsive and flexible to meet the needs of rural communities who live with the reality of the size and difficulties associated with geography, and with the lack of anonymity in rural communities. Greater involvement of rural communities in the design of government programs would help address these needs.

At the end of each roundtable, the women who participated expressed their view that they felt less isolated because they had this opportunity to be heard by decision-makers. They also appreciated the fact that the Ministry responsible for Rural Development had responded to requests made by rural women. They saw the distribution of this report to other Cabinet Ministers as an important step towards bridging the rural/urban divide.

However they also recommended that this process not end. They recommended that the Rural Development Office continue to provide the opportunity for women living in rural communities to come together to discuss rural development opportunities. They recommended a province-wide conference in the autumn as a focus for sharing experiences across rural communities and helping to address the feelings of isolation experienced by rural communities throughout BC.

The recommendations made to date will be reviewed by Minister Ed Conroy and his colleagues over the next month.

However, one recommendation has already been accepted. Evelyn Gillespie, the Minister for Women's Equality, asked that the roundtables continue, and Minister Conroy agreed that if women in a community ask for a women's roundtable, the Rural Development Office will facilitate and help with the organization.

The Rural Development Office is currently reviewing the list of communities who have also requested roundtables, and will be announcing dates and locations shortly.

ATTACHMENT A

Community participants who attended:

Leslie Baird
Jackie Somerville
Kathy Cruckshank
Betty Ann Juba
Michele Bagelman
Jennifer Walton
Coreen Cherry
Ann Davis
Karen Turner
Linda Moore
Edda Grant
Sharon Bennett
Pam Willis
Leticia Clark
Veronica Timmons
Bunny Shannon
Brenda McBride
Beryl Mottershead
Judy Nolan
Meg Cursons
Janit Bianic
Vickey Brown
Emma Payton
Catherine Berry
Lori Iannidinardo
Carol Fryer
Alison Hayden-Luck
Nancy Boyce
Deb Thorne
Pat Danforth
Edythe Field
Eileen Little
Doran Doyle
Kate Mortimer
Merna Moffat
Virginia White
Beverly Bell
Lynda Earle
Glynis Eve
Jacquie Rafuse
Cleone Ratcliffe
Hazel Beech
Linda Graitson
Pamela Eberhardt
Helga Lambrecht
Ruth Waddell
Jean Compton
Jennifer Bendell
Pat Foster
Renee Leggr
Heather Hoult
Irene white
Mary Dolan
Barb Park
Pat Danforth
Deb Thorne
Jacqueline Little
Basha Rahn
Nora Nicol
Cathryn Wellner
Rose Soneff
Connie Deforge
Gail Edinger
Peggy Christianson
Dawna Ottenbreight
Diana French
Paula Kully
Mieke
Jen Jones
Viola Dolph
Brenda Wilkinson
Cheryl Chapman
Bernice Saunders
Donna Hill
Edie Sellars
Nancy Opperman
Gloria Attamenko
Gail Morrison
Anita Edwards
Linda Hubler
Cheryl Englemen
Jana Lundy
Helen Horn
Virginia Gilbert
Joanne Houghton
Roberta Gilbert
Kirsten Hamm
Lorraine Sellers
Karen Seraphim
Jeanette Wood
Penny Armstrong
Nancy Blumhagen
Lesley Tannen
Joanie Bottonley
Michelle Longevin
Elly McNaster
Jane Bland
Cindy Smith
Sharron Middler
Stephanie Ungerer
Christina Ince
Hilma LaBelle
June Phillips
Esther Crumb
Phyllis Bentley
Roberta Robertson
Heather Kelliher
Daphne Reid
Rosemary Doughty
Marcela Toro
Nancy Noble-Hearle
Heather Perry-Doyle
Margaret Surina
Deborah Stewart
Anda Jones
Tina Sager
Helen Overnes
Margarita Wood
Manjit Channa
Nicole Verpaelst
Heather MacDonald
Anne Clark
Jean Forbes
Catherine Halkett
Shelley Hawn
Monica Kamps
Debbie Kereluk
Patricia Kristie
Clara Berde
Bonnie Munday
Nadine Tonita
Brenda Wolki
Donna Heningson

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Ministers and MLAs who participated:

Hon. Evelyn Gillespie, Minister of Women's Equality & MLA for Comox Valley
Jan Pullinger, MLA for Lake Cowichan
Hon. David Zirnhelt, Minister of Aboriginal Affairs & MLA for Cariboo South
Hon. Ed Conroy, Minister of Agriculture, Food & Fisheries, Minister responsible for Rural Development & MLA for Rossland-Trail

Government staff who contributed or participated:

Pam Alcorn, Rural Development Office, Ministry of Agriculture & Food
Jacki St. Dennis, Ministry of Health & Rural Development Office
Susan Vasilev, Rural Development Office, Ministry of Agriculture & Food
Leslie Lelond, Rural Development Office, Ministry of Agriculture & Food
Louis Helbig, Rural Development Office, Ministry of Agriculture & Food

Janys Milne, Government Policy & Communications
Wendy Klyne, Ministry of Community Development, Cooperatives & Volunteers
Steve Hilbert, Ministry of Community Development, Cooperatives & Volunteers
Pat Tonn, Ministry of Agriculture & Food
Anne Bauman, Ministry of Women's Equality
Anne Speer, Ministry of Health, Women's Health Bureau
Heather Hoult, Ministry of Health
Monica Kendel, Ministry of Women's Equality
Melanie Saxby, Forest Renewal BC
Peter Wyatt, Ministry of Forests
Arnold Harasymchuk, Forest Renewal BC
Bryan Johnston, Government Agent, SBTC
Sam Brand, Ministry of Transportation & Highways
Bonnie Prest, Ministry of Small Business, Tourism & Culture
Darlene Allen, Government Agent, SBTC
Sharlene Hinz, Ministry of Social Development & Economic Security
Carol-Ann Hicks, Ministry of Social Development & Economic Security
Val Liske, Ministry of Women's Equality
Sandra Chester, Ministry of Women's Equality
Jacqueline Beck, Ministry of Social Development & Economic Security
Randy Sunderman, Forest Renewal BC
Gretchen Hartley, Ministry of Women's Equality
Cathie Green, Ministry of Women's Equality

Sandra Varchal, Human Resources Development Canada
Agnes Lui, Status of Women Canada
Christina Prasad, Canadian Rural Secretariat
Andrea Langlois, Status of Women Canada

ATTACHMENT B

DATE AND LOCATION OF ROUNDTABLES

Monday, 29 January 2001: Cumberland Cultural Centre.

Thursday, 1 February 2001: Cowichan Lake Education Centre.

Thursday, 8 February 2001: St. Andrew's United Church, Williams Lake

Thursday, 22 February 2001: Penticton Lakeside Resort, Penticton

ATTACHMENT C -- Sample agenda

WOMEN'S ROUNDTABLE ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT

AGENDA

9:00- 9:30	Registration
9:30-10:00	Welcome from Community Chair
	Ed Conroy, Honourable Minister Responsible for Rural Development
	General discussion: What is *Rural?*
10:00 - 10:45	Identification of Issues
10:45 - 11:00	Break
11:00 - 12:45	Small Group Discussions: *What's Working; What Needs to Happen; Who Needs to Be Involved*
12:45 - 1:30	Lunch
1:30 -2:15	Report backs from Sessions
2:15 - 2:30	Closing Remarks

Thank you for joining us today

ATTACHMENT C -- Backgrounder

People in rural communities have consistently told the province that the needs of rural British Columbia are different from those of urban BC. Earlier this year, the Premier made rural development a government priority & highlighted his commitment to giving communities more power to shape their future.

Why do rural communities need more power?

- While over 40% of the BC population lives outside of Vancouver & Victoria, economic & social disparity between the lower mainland & rural communities is growing.
- Rural communities are facing challenges related to the changing global economy & it's impact on our society.
- People living in rural BC are already changing the way they work with government. Government needs to change its way of doing business to make it easier for people in rural communities to participate fully.

Ed Conroy, the Minister responsible for Rural Development, believes that rural communities know what is best for them, & that government should be listening to their ideas & suggestions. Therefore, he welcomed a proposal from women living in the Cariboo-Chilcotin for bringing government to listen to their views on rural development. The concept of informal roundtables where women could talk with government & each other grew out of these requests.

Currently, there are 4 roundtables scheduled in Cumberland, Lake Cowichan, Williams Lake & Penticton. The purpose of these roundtable discussions is to hear what women - particularly those who have not had the opportunity - think about:

- what is working today, & what can work to encourage rural development in their communities.
- how people from First Nations, communities, regional districts, municipalities, the federal & provincial government can work together.
- rural connections: transportation, telecommunications & internet
- rural health care & rural access to education opportunities
- rural access to social services
- small & home-based business development
- economic diversification: jobs, value-added industry, high-tech
- greening rural communities
- community connections in rural BC: networking & participating across cultural, economic, social realities

The Rural Development Office was asked to facilitate these roundtables so that the voices of rural women are heard & brought to the attention of government when seeking solutions & strategies to encourage rural sustainability in British Columbia.

WHAT IS THE RURAL DEVELOPMENT OFFICE?

The RDO is a very small unit within the Ministry of Agriculture & Food, and its mandate is to:

- Work with provincial ministries to ensure implementation of the recommendations from 4 of the 5 Premier's Summits on Economic Opportunity. The Northern Development Commission has responsibility for the Northern Summit.

- Work on rural initiatives that involve more than one provincial ministry. For example, RDO:
  - Works closely with the ministries of Community Development, Co-operatives & Volunteers, Small Business, Tourism & Culture, Employment & Investment, the Northern Development Office, & Transportation & Highways to coordinate & avoid duplication of government efforts in rural areas.
  - Does not accept applications or proposals for government programs or funds. Program information & application procedures for government funding or support remain entirely the responsibility of the Ministry responsible. The Rural Development Office refers all applicants directly to the appropriate ministry.

- Work closely with rural MLAs, First Nations, rural stakeholders & with all levels of government to foster both the social & economic development of rural areas.

- Identifies opportunities for social or economic development in rural areas, recommends action & supports Minister on rural visits.

In addition to coordinating & facilitating solutions across ministries & government agencies, the office works closely with existing rural-based non-government organizations to help move forward projects that can contribute to diversification & development.

RDO seeks to solve problems - not run programs. It addresses specific problems by brokering solutions across ministry lines in ways that make common sense & will achieve results.

Why is RDO in the Ministry of Agriculture & Food?

Although RDO is responsible for both social & economic development in rural communities, its primary focus has to date been on economic opportunities.

Rural BC depends on economic opportunities primarily in the traditional resource sectors:

- Forestry
- Fisheries
- Agriculture

While forestry & fisheries are facing some challenges from restructuring & global markets, the agri-food economy in the province has been growing.

Agriculture:

- Is 1/3rd the size of BC's forest industry;
- Same size as BC's mining industry;
- 3 times the size of BC's oil & gas industry; and
- over 10 times the size of BC's fishing industry.

Agriculture also:

- is the only primary industry that has created jobs at the same pace as population growth for the past 20 years; and
- is the only primary industry to show sustained job growth over the last 10 years - all other primary industries have lost jobs in that time.

As Minister for Agriculture, Food & Fisheries & with responsibility for BC Assets & Land Corporation (BCAL), the Minister can influence some of the key economic drivers in rural BC. BCAL supports opportunities for diversification & development in rural areas of the province by managing Crown land tenures.

Commercial recreation & shellfish tenures, for example, are essential components of managing environmentally sustainable economic development throughout rural areas of the province.

Other jurisdictions have also included rural development or rural affairs with ministries of agriculture & food. Examples include:

- Federal government
- Alberta
- Ontario
- New Brunswick
- Ireland

Health, education and social services:

People have been asking the Rural Development Office to take on projects that involve health care or education or social services. To date, our efforts have focused on individual projects such as supporting the provincial participation at the National Health Conference on Rural and Remote Health Care held in January 2001 in Prince George.

RURAL DEVELOPMENT: FACTS & ISSUES

Last year, BC's rural economy experienced a mixed performance.

On the one hand, unemployment fell in most rural communities last year; but so did the number of jobs. North Coast, Nechako, Cariboo, Kootenays & the Northeast had on average a 2% drop in numbers of jobs available.

Northeast BC saw doubling of sales for crown drilling rights & a 24% increase in the value of natural gas production; but coastal communities dependent on fishing continued to face challenges due to harvesting restrictions & capacity reductions.

Forest companies earned $600 million in 1999 after losing $1 billion in 1998; but these profits were due to a robust US housing market & rising lumber & pulp prices & this sector is one of the key ingredients to our rural boom-bust economy.

While urban areas of our province face unique problems: urban sprawl, pollution or access to mass transit; rural areas also have unique problems:

- lack of population density - around 40% of British Columbians live outside the lower mainland & Victoria.
- Resource-based industries are cyclical in nature. Commodity prices fluctuate & good times follow downturns.

Diversification is crucial to address the boom-bust cycle that affects many communities in rural BC, and small business can play an important role:

- 103,000 jobs - over 80% of all jobs created in BC between 1994 &1998 were created by small business.
- The Cariboo saw the biggest growth in small business (15%).

High-tech businesses in rural areas grew by 62% between 1994 & 1998 & regional centres such as Prince George & Kelowna are beginning to develop clusters of high tech start up companies. However forestry remains the primary source of jobs & economic growth for nearly 90% of rural communities in BC.

Rural development is about creating the opportunities for rural residents to break the boom-bust cycle & find greater stability & long-term sustainability in their economy.

Therefore to meet these different needs, the Rural Development Office was established. Its objectives are:

- To encourage long-term prosperity for people living in rural BC through access to a diversified & sustainable resource base;
- To help rural British Columbians participate in deciding about their own future; and
- To ensure rural British Columbians share equally in the benefits of the increasingly global & knowledge-based provincial economy.